

Temporality and Alterity in Descartes' *Meditations*

Abstract:

It is the task of the present work to analyze the themes of temporality and alterity as they were developed within Descartes' *Meditations*. In order to accomplish this task, I follow the movements of the *Meditations* itself, particularly the Second and Third, and integrate certain of the claims from the *Principles of Philosophy* and the *Discourse on the Method* to supplement my interpretation. I argue that the certainty of the *cogito* attained in the Second Meditation is connected to an implicit theory of inner time-consciousness, and that the certainty of the *cogito* is inherently and necessarily temporal. The analysis of the temporality of the *cogito* from the Second Meditation then leads to the theme of alterity in the Third Meditation. After demonstrating and elucidating Descartes' notion of time-consciousness, we are led to the question of how it is that the ego is maintained in existence across time, or, said somewhat differently, how time itself exists. The answer to this question takes place through an analysis of the idea of God, that is, an analysis of alterity, and reveals that the ego is dependent upon God to be re-created at each moment. With the insight into the manner in which the temporality of consciousness is preserved, I conclude that the inner time-consciousness from the Second Meditation is also the consciousness of the source that preserves inner time-consciousness. In other words, self-consciousness is also consciousness of the Other. Finally, I turn to the freedom of the subject and explain how it is possible for subjectivity to remain independent or free, despite its ontological dependence on God. In order to further articulate the relations of independence and dependence between subjectivity and God, and thus the interweaving of temporality and alterity, I incorporate the theory of the origin of error from the Fourth Meditation, and show how the subject retains an epistemological independence within the realm of its ontological dependence.